

Thomas Jefferson to William C. C. Claiborne, April 27, 1806, The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO WILLIAM CHARLES COLES CLAIBORNE J. MSS.

Washington, Ap. 27, 06.

Dear Sir, —This letter is confidential, but not official. It is meant to give you a general idea of our views as to N. Orleans, of which you will receive the particulars from the Secretary at War, whose instructions nothing here said is meant to controul should they vary in any particular. At the meeting of Congress, I recommended an arrangement of our militia, which, by giving us a selection of the younger part of it, would have enabled us, if necessary to have sent a very efficient support to N. Orleans. A diversity of ideas however among the members, arising from partialities to local systems, defeated that. Then we endeavored to encourage settlers West of the Missipi by a bounty of land, conditioned to serve there 2. years as regulars if called on. This also failed. Congress having closed their session, the means furnished for the support of N. O. have at length assumed their definitive shape, and I believe are adequate to the present state & prospect of things. According to our last dispatches from Spain that government shews such pacific dispositions, that if any hostilities take place in your quarter they will certainly not be by order of that government, but will be merely the effect of the passions & interests of her officers. Were Spain disposed, she could send no troops across the Atlantic. At Havanna she is so far from having any to spare, that she is obliged to use militia for ordinary garrison duty. At Pensacola & Mobile she has about 600. men. At Baton rouge about 170. These are all we know of which she could bring to attack you. What force she has

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in Mexico we know not. The means of defence to be immediately furnished you will be as follows: 1. three gun-boats will immediately proceed from the Atlantic border to Lake Pontchartrain. 2. bomb-vessels (being the only vessels we have in readiness here at this moment) will proceed to the Missipi to remain until relieved by 6 gunboats, either of those directly expected from the Mediterranean, or of those built on the Ohio, whichever

shall first be in place. These 9 gunboats we consider as sufficient to secure all the water approaches to N. Orleans against any force we have a right to suppose can be brought against it under present circumstances.

2. We propose immediately to prepare block houses, pickets &c. on the defiles leading by land to the city; particularly on the road from Mashac, & on the approaches from the lakes. It is thought best on account of their health, not to bring the troops into the island, but to keep them in the nearest healthy situations from which they can repair to the city on very short notice. 1200 including those now in the city will be so placed. We presume you can raise about 1500 of militia and seamen, on an emergency, to be depended on; and that these behind their defensive works while the gunboats guard the water communications will secure the city effectually. 3. The militia of Tombigbee & Natchez will be ordered to be immediately put into a state of organization & readiness, so that should the garrisons of Pensacola, Mobile & Baton rouge, be drawn off to attack you, the respective militias may seize on these posts, & close in the rear of the attackers, to cut off their retreat. I have said that this letter is confidential, because our means ought not to be known to the Spaniards until they are seen. It will therefore be proper to prepare your militia with diligence, yet under the profession of ordinary precaution only. An engineer will be immediately sent forward to plan & execute the works. Congress has voted a sufficient sum of money for our postal: but to avoid giving new irritation to Spain, it has confined it's expenditure to within the 31st degree. We are therefore obliged to relinquish for the present the road from Fort Stoddert direct to the mouth of Pearl & to go from Fort Stoddert to Pinckneyville keeping

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above the line. This is sorely against my will, & will continue no longer than necessity requires.

As the road thus proposed will soon strike the Pascagola, we think to

use that river for the present in our communications between N. O. and Fort Stoddert. We expect that one of the gunboats of the lakes can ascend above the line. This is done because we wish to avoid collision with the Spanish authorities as much as possible till we can hear from Paris, & judge of the turn things will take there.

I have lately seen a letter from Mr. Duplantier to Mr. Madison, and am much pleased with his zeal in the interest of M. de Lafayette. Congress has permitted lots to be taken for him as low as 500 acres. This secures to us the parcel on the canal of Carondelet; but at the same time cuts off those smaller locations proposed by Mr. Duplantier. Indeed it would not be for the interest of the General to let his claim get into collision with any public interest. Were it to lose it's popularity it might excite an opposition neither agreeable to his feelings nor interests.

I promised a Mr. Reibelt to speak to you of him. He is a Swiss by birth, a strong republican in principle, was in favor of the French Directory, and is I think a very honest man, and certainly a man of great literary information. Having a family, & under some difficulties as to property which he says he has in Europe, he has accepted the care of the Indian factory at Natchitoches, where I think his philanthropy will recommend him to the attachment of the Indians. It is in compliance with his request to be made known to you that I mention these things.

I thank you for a bag of peccans lately received from you. If you could think of me in the autumn, when they are fresh, they will always be very acceptable, partly to plant, partly for table use.

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I observe a motion in your legislature to desire me to chuse a fifth counsellor out of the i o before nominated. This being against law cannot be done; I hope therefore they will have nominated two as the law requires.

Accept my friendly salutations & assurances of esteem & respect.